

Notes: October 12, 2019

Start: 10 AM

Order of service:

1. Meet and Greet
2. Introduction (if new people)
3. Ma Tovv
4. Open in Prayer for service
5. Liturgy – Sh'ma +
6. Announcements
7. Jeri - Drash
8. Praise and Worship Songs
9. Message
10. Aaronic Blessing
11. Kiddush
12. Oneg

Children's Blessing:

Transliteration: *Ye'simcha Elohim ke-Ephraim ve hee-Menashe*

English: *May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe*

Transliteration: *Ye'simech Elohim ke-Sarah, Rivka, Rachel ve-Leah.*

English: *May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.*

Introduction: Where Is Vayikra (Leviticus) 16?

I did something on Wednesday that I haven't done since my childhood.

I walked to synagogue on Yom Kippur.

This may not sound like much, but it most certainly brought back memories.

I had decided to attend the Yom Kippur service at Beit Ha'am just down the road on Wednesday morning in that we were not able to have our own morning service due to meeting at the school. So, when I looked at their schedule for the day, I saw that they were going to have a Torah study at 9 AM.

It was a 20 minute walk from home to the synagogue. As I arrived, they asked if I had a name tag. I believe the name tags were due to heightened security due to past attacks on synagogues during the High Holy Days.

After getting my name tag, I went into the sanctuary and sat down...it was the children's service.

Getting up with the intent of attending the Torah study, I asked the room and was graciously directed to the stairway to the second floor.

When I arrived at the classroom, they were already handing out material. In looking at the sheet at the same time the instructor was passing out the sheets, he stated that we will be looking at Parshah Nitzavim- D'varim (Deuteronomy) 29:9 – 30:20.

My initial response was one of confusion...because in my mind I was anticipating Leviticus 16 as being what was traditional read and studied on Yom Kippur.

The instructor conveyed that the Reform movement has selected this passage of Scripture to be read on Yom Kippur.

I start thinking about this as being odd, but go with the flow. There are about 20 of us sitting in a circle as we are instructed to introduce ourselves by sharing our names. After the pleasantries have concluded we start with the reading of the passages of Scripture from Deuteronomy 29:9 – 13 and 30:15 – 20, followed by a discussion based on a handout from Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of England. Based on Deuteronomy 30:19...

Deu 30:19 "I call on heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have presented you with life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, so that you will live, you and your descendants,

The study / discussion focused on two words of this verse "choose life"

There were three parts to the study, whereby the Rabbi would look at each word "choose" and then "life" separately followed by the phrase "choose life" as one. We will break down his teaching during Torah Study.

For now, I want to share some of the aspects from the discussion

The first term that struck me was "contemporary Judaism" for which the Reform movement basis its understanding.

Later, I looked up the antonym (opposite) for contemporary and was not surprised to find that it referenced "old fashioned" and "outdated"

I share this because of the instructor's words based on how Reform Judaism selected the Torah passage for Yom Kippur.

So everything is based on a contemporary, something that is based on the present, in other words relevancy. And as I later thought about his words, it all made sense as to where they were coming from. The sacrificial system is most certainly not contemporary, let alone relevant...it is old fashioned and outdated. Yet if something is old fashioned and outdated, does it truly lack relevancy? Keep this question in the back of your minds for a bit.

The discussion of Torah study first focused on the word choose. And was framed around our ability to choose, not based on free will, but rather based on freedom. As Jews, we have the ability to choose how we are to live by Scripture.

It was at this time that a comment regarding orthodoxy came up.

Orthodoxy - authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine, or practice.

The comment centered around one's ability in being able to choose the orthodoxy they could follow.

So, the emphasis has shifted from Scripture / Customs / Tradition as being the distinguishing factor in expressing how you are to live...

To what orthodoxy you choose that in essence determines how you are to live.

You in essence can choose to be Reform, and therefore whatever the orthodoxy is for being Reform is what you are to do. Likewise the same would be true for Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism.

On your chairs you have the different branches and the perspective they all represent. We will look at that later.

Getting back to the Torah Study discussion. My only response during that session, and I have to tell you there is much that could have been said based on the comments from the perspective of contemporary Judaism. I had to be mindful of being a guest at another congregation.

And yet, what I was about to say, I don't believe was truly comprehended.

Remember the emphasis of the last comment was being able to choose your orthodoxy and therefore your expression.

My comment was:

“God didn't distinguish between Jews and therefore different orthodoxies of Judaism.”.

The point that I was trying to make was that you don't choose what you do as Jews, because part of the conversation distinguished this notion. In choosing to be Orthodox, you choose to do these things associated with being Orthodox. Just as in choosing to be Reform, you choose to do the things associated with being reform.

Put this notion in your own context for a moment. Is this really any different when you may have identified yourself as Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal?

And yet this perspective, appeared to be one of comfort. “We don't have to do everything the Orthodox do, because we have chosen to be Reform”

Yet, Adonai didn't make this distinction according to His Word. Looking at Deuteronomy 30 in greater detail...yes the focus was on verse 19, yet what is Deuteronomy 30 about...

After having received from Adonai the Blessings and the Curses, associated to their obedience of His Mitzvot, Adonai in chapter 30 conveys a Prophetic future for the nation of Israel.

Deu 30:1 "When the time arrives that all these things have come upon you, both the blessing and the curse which I have presented to you; and you are there among the nations to which Adonai your God has driven you; then, at last, you will start thinking about what has happened to you;

Adonai is conveying a time when Israel will turn away from Him and as a result of this will be cast out from the land into the nations. A defiant people rebelling against Adonai only later to come to their senses...

Deu 30:2 and you will return to Adonai your God and pay attention to what he has said, which will be exactly what I am ordering you to do today - you and your children, with all your heart and all your being.

It would have been less complicated if we only had paid attention the first time, as is what is being alluded to here.

Then we see the restorative power of Adonai when His people will return to Him...

Deu 30:3 At that point, Adonai your God will reverse your exile and show you mercy; he will return and gather you from all the peoples to which Adonai your God scattered you.

Deu 30:4 If one of yours was scattered to the far end of the sky, Adonai your God will gather you even from there; he will go there and get you.

Deu 30:5 Adonai your God will bring you back into the land your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you prosper there, and you will become even more numerous than your ancestors.

Deu 30:6 Then Adonai your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children, so that you will love Adonai your God with all your heart and all your being, and thus you will live.

Adonai promises what He will do when they return. He will bring them back into the land from where He has scattered them. In so doing, He will also circumcise their hearts and the hearts of their children so that they will

not only love Adonai, but that we will love Him with this new circumcised heart where there is no blockage, no arrhythmia, no hardening of the arteries.

In so doing this, Adonai has restored His people, yet this doesn't change what He requires from us...

When they return, yet their restoration is conditional...

Deu 30:10 "However, all this will happen **only if** you pay attention to what Adonai your God says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah, if you turn to Adonai your God with all your heart and all your being.

And then followed by the pep talk...

Deu 30:11 For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach.

Deu 30:12 It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'

Deu 30:13 Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'

Deu 30:14 On the contrary, the word is very close to you - in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!

Adonai is presenting two options to the children of Israel...

Deu 30:15 "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil -

Deu 30:16 in that I am ordering you today to love Adonai your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings ; for if you do, you will live and increase your numbers; and Adonai your God will bless you in the land you are entering in order to take possession of it.

Life and good vs. death and evil

It is not a choice of which orthodoxy you will live by, but rather His orthodoxy = His mitzvot.

Deu 30:17 But if your heart turns away, if you refuse to listen, if you are drawn away to prostrate yourselves before other gods and serve them;

Deu 30:18 I am announcing to you today that you will certainly perish; you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Yarden to enter and possess.

Choosing incorrectly, that is death and evil will lead to consequences.

It is this verse here that Adonai concludes is the only logical decision...

Deu 30:19 "I call on heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have presented you with life and death, the blessing and the curse. **Therefore, choose life, so that you will live**, you and your descendants,

Deu 30:20 loving Adonai your God, paying attention to what he says and clinging to him - for that is the purpose of your life! On this depends the length of time you will live in the land Adonai swore he would give to your ancestors Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya`akov."

Joh 10:7 So Yeshua said to them again, "Yes, indeed! I tell you that I am the gate for the sheep.

Joh 10:8 All those who have come before me have been thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them.

Joh 10:9 I am the gate; if someone enters through me, he will be safe and will go in and out and find pasture.

Joh 10:10 The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, life in its fullest measure.

I have come to give you life in its fullest measure (more abundantly)

The fullness comes from first choosing life, that is choosing the way that leads to life,

Psa 106:7 Our ancestors in Egypt failed to grasp the meaning of your wonders. They didn't keep in mind your great deeds of grace but rebelled at the sea, at the Sea of Suf.

Psa 106:8 Yet he saved them for his own name's sake, to make known his mighty power.

It isn't just our ancestors who don't understand. Today, it is our contemporaries who do not understand.

They have interpreted this aspect of choosing life as a means of how they decide to live, when in reality, this choice has nothing to do with the selective nature of our decision, but rather the totality of our decision. It is in choosing Him and what He stipulates that leads to life.

Interestingly, as part of the discussion, there were distinctions made by several in the class regarding the positions of Christianity. How the life that is emphasised is that which is not now, that is eternal life. Where it almost seemed like a prideful notion, we have chosen what we can impact rather than that for which we cannot impact. The very notion of Tikkun olam – healing / restoration of the world seems to be the emphasis.

The choice is the same today as it was then. This isn't a contemporary decision, nor is it an outdated decision.

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Mat 7:13 "Go in through the narrow gate; for the gate that leads to destruction is wide and the road broad, and many travel it;

Mat 7:14 but it is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

For a moment, let's look at the Reform characteristics in that this is where I was on Wednesday...Because I owe you an answer to a question – Where is Leviticus 16?

REFORM:

- Begin in the 18th Century as an attempt to reconcile/accommodate Judaism with Modernity
- Sabbath services performed in the vernacular
- Liturgy removed references to ancient practice of animal sacrifice and to the hope of a return to Zion
- Judaism is understood as an evolving, open-ended religion rather than as one that is already fixed and/or determined by the revealed Torah
 - Cultivates a sense of Universalism

Liturgy removed references to ancient practices of animal sacrifice...

There you have it, the reason why there is no Leviticus 16.

And in moving Leviticus 16 in a similar manner as removing Isaiah 53, they are in essence concealing what we know about Yeshua.

Interestingly, last night I got out my mother's machzor, dating back to 1978. Believe it or not, even 40+ years ago, the Torah portion for Yom Kippur was Deuteronomy 29 and 30.

I was just too young and uninformed to have realised it back then.

The service for Yom Kippur also had a Machsor, which was rather interesting. Comprising much of the entries in this Machsor were some Scripture, some Talmudic, while other entries that were part of the liturgy for Yom Kippur came from contemporary Rabbis and other the likes of Richard Fynman, Henry David Thoreau and Albert Einstein. Poetry and “words of wisdom from contemporary culture.

Everything, true to Reform orthodoxy avoided anything to do with sacrifice. This very notion further conveys the challenge in witnessing to Jewish people. If they have been desensitised to the importance of sacrifice from Adonai's perspective, then conveying Yeshua has become even more challenging.

Why sacrifice...we don't need sacrifice. Hosea 6:6 is the basis for this mindset, for which I had shared with you last week.

Hos 6:6 For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifice, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Yet, what was the context that I shared with you last week...

In its proper context of chapter six, there is a desire to return to Adonai and have Him restore Efrayim and Y'hudah,

Hos 6:3 Let us know, let us strive to know Adonai. That he will come is as certain as morning; he will come to us like the rain, like the spring rains that water the earth.

yet this is Adonai's response...

Hos 6:4 "Efrayim, what should I do to you? Y'hudah, what should I do to you? For your 'faithful love' is like a morning cloud, like dew that disappears quickly.

Hos 6:5 This is why I have cut them to pieces by the prophets, slaughtered them with the words from my mouth — the judgment on you shines out like light.

Hos 6:6 For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifices, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Hos 6:7 "But they, just like men, have broken the covenant, they have been faithless in dealing with me.

So, there are what I would call contemporary challenges associated with your witness to the Jewish community and the contemporary mindset that has in essence eradicated any reference and therefore relevance of sacrifice from their orthodoxy. The power of your witness comes from the Word of Adonai. They will in essence have to defend their position against the Word of Adonai, Scripture itself.

Branches of Contemporary Judaism

ORTHODOX:

- Most conservative branch of contemporary Judaism
- Considers the Hebrew Bible as the revealed Word of God, and the Talmud as the legitimate and binding oral law
- Emphasizes the importance of maintaining a distinct Jewish identity

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CONSERVATIVE:

- Largest Jewish movement in the United States
- Manifests a total dedication to traditional rabbinical Judaism, and at the same time, remains open to interpretation and restructuring so that Judaism is not misinterpreted as a dead religion
- Supportive of the historical-critical method of studying authoritative Jewish texts

RECONSTRUCTIST:

- Branched off from Conservative
- Convinced that strong measures needed to be taken in order to preserve Judaism in the face of modern Rationalism
- Believes that the notion that the Torah was supernaturally revealed is difficult to reconcile with modernity
- Judaism is defined as an "evolving religious civilization"
- Jewish people and culture believed to be the heart/essence of Judaism, not texts and tradition (i.e., tradition exists for people, not vice versa)
 - Created a new Prayer Book that is more open to women and Gentiles, that eliminates references to the physical resurrection of the body, and that reinterprets Biblical passages that describe God as actively rewarding and punishing Israel, and manipulating natural phenomenon